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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 000993

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SUBJECT: POLITICAL POWER IN THE RUN-UP TO ELECTIONS
(C-AL6-01048)

REF: A. NOUAKCHOTT 979
[1](#)B. NOUAKCHOTT 842

Classified By: Amb. Joseph LeBaron, Reasons 1.4(b)(d)

(C) Key Points

-- The political environment in Mauritania is constantly changing, with political parties and coalitions regularly forming and dissolving, and new presidential hopefuls declaring their candidacy every week.

-- Little separates one party from the next. However, a handful of parties and candidates have risen above the milieu, and, at present, appear to be political front-runners.

(C) Comments

-- The November municipal and legislative elections will almost certainly clarify those actors most likely to capture the presidency in March 2007.

-- While opinions differ about the potential role of the Military Council in the elections (septel), there is no evidence to date that the council is backing any candidate or party.

End Key Points and Comments.

[1](#)1. (C) The political environment in Mauritania is constantly changing, with political parties and coalitions regularly forming and dissolving, and new presidential hopefuls declaring their candidacy every week. Few political actors have strong platforms, and little separates one party from the next (see ref A. for a summary of all recognized political parties and coalitions). However, a handful of parties and candidates have risen above the milieu, and, at present, appear to be political front-runners. The following text summarizes these key players and attempts to offer some insight into the presidential elections scheduled for March [1](#)2007. It will be necessary to adjust these observations as March draws closer, particularly following the November municipal and legislative elections which will almost certainly clarify those actors most likely to capture the

presidency.

THE MAJOR COALITION

12. (C) The recently formed "Coalition of Forces for Democratic Change (CFDC)," has quickly established itself as the leading political party coalition, bringing together four of the seven most influential parties in Mauritania. The coalition also includes the largest following of Islamists (including Jemil Ould Mansour and Moktar Mohamed Moussa), the PMUC (the political party of the Knights of Change which led several unsuccessful coups against former president Taya), and FLAM Renovation (a breakaway wing of the exiled Afro-Mauritanian opposition group FLAM).

13. (C) The CFDC has committed to working collectively to prevent any candidates from the former regime from being elected. Specifically, the group is concerned about the influence of the "Republican Party for Democracy and Revival (PRDR)" and the "Rally for Democracy and Unity (RDU)," which together controlled the government under Taya.

14. (C) However, the CFDC's future is far from certain, as many parties within the coalition have strong presidential ambitions, and some parties (such as the "Mauritanian Party for Union and Change (PMUC)") are struggling with internal dissent.

THE POLITICAL PARTIES TO WATCH

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15. (C) The former power brokers PRDR and RDU remain among the strongest, wealthiest, and best organized political parties in Mauritania. The two are reportedly in discussions to form a coalition, however, many believe such an arrangement would be made in secret, with the two parties privately supporting the same "independent" presidential candidate. The need for secrecy arises from the public's perception that these two parties (particularly PRDR) were, and perhaps still are, closely linked to former president Taya. If either group ran a presidential candidate, the public could label them a carryover from the Taya era, and the CFDC would also certainly campaign against them. The public's tolerance for PRDR/RDU candidates will likely be tested in the coming November elections.

16. (C) The four most influential CFDC members include "Gathering of Democratic Forces (RFD)," "Union for Force and Progress (UFP)," "Popular Progressive Alliance (APP)," and the "Mauritanian Party for Union and Change (PMUC)." PMUC co-founder Mohamed Ould Cheikhna is currently the only individual among the four parties to have declared his candidacy for the presidency, however, many others are expected to follow suite (including PMUC president Saleh Ould Hanena).

17. (C) The remaining party of influence is the "Union for Democracy and Progress (UDP)" headed by Naha Mint Mouknass, the only female political party president. UDP is expected to capture several Parliamentary seats, but not run a presidential candidate (Mouknass is herself too young to run for the presidency).

THE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

18. (C) RFD's President Ahmed Ould Daddah (the brother of Mauritania's first post-independence President) is the name most often offered when discussing who will be the next president. Daddah received 6.85 percent of the vote in the

2003 presidential elections, and while he has not publicly announced his candidacy, he has privately said that he will run. His party has attracted many new high-profile members since the coup, including close friends and relatives of Colonel Fal.

¶9. (C) Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdallahi was the first independent candidate to announce he was running for the presidency. Abdallahi is seen by many as a viable alternative to Daddah, as both men are respected former ministers with economic backgrounds who come from important families and tribes. Abdallahi is also married to a cousin of Colonel Fal and Colonel Aziz. Some observers believe that PRDR and RDU will secretly support Abdallahi's bid for president.

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¶10. (C) Ahmed Ould Abdallah, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for West Africa, has also been identified as a powerful presidential candidate, though he is reportedly reluctant to run. Abdallah, who has spent most of his professional life with the UN, is seen as honest and articulate, but also as an outsider.

¶11. (C) Dehane Ould Ahmed Mahmoud, a retired colonel and former Minister of Foreign Affairs, is seen as a viable presidential candidate. With his military background and friendship to Colonel Fall, Mahmoud is seen as an acceptable candidate for the Military Council (and viewed as a potential favorite by those who believe the Military Council will attempt to sway the presidential outcome).

¶12. (C) Other names which have been offered for the presidency include APP president Messaoud Ould Boulkheir and PMUC president Saleh Ould Hanena. However, Boulkheir would face significant resistance from Mauriticians unwilling to support a Black Moor president; while Hanena, a former coup leader, would be highly controversial (and likely disagreeable to the existing power base, some of whom he tried to unseat with his coup attempts).
Koutsis